Forty1

Wellbeing
at work

The need to
bring about real,
lasting change via
a strategic approach

Introduction

How can we **integrate** wellbeing more effectively into day-to-day business and bring it to the **top of the corporate agenda?**

How do we make wellbeing more **quantifiable and measurable?**

How do we **normalise conversations** around wellbeing and mental health and **create a transparent and open culture?**

How can employee wellbeing **drive business performance and amplify the entire employee experience?**

What does **authentic employee wellbeing** even look like in the modern workplace?

Like our business community, we also wanted the answers to these questions.

We invited a selection of cross industry professionals from leadership, HR and communications to join an online conversation on wellbeing.

We created a safe space to discuss workplace cultures, mental health, employee experience and existing wellbeing challenges.

COVID-19 has also made the corporate approach to wellbeing even more crucial. With more people working from home or in a hybrid way, it can be more difficult to find a unified approach.

However, such challenging times can also present us with opportunities. How do we capitalise on this unique moment to create lasting change through wellbeing?

We would like to thank the participants for their honest and open responses. We hope that this report helps you to better navigate wellbeing in your organisation.

Wellbeing: a definition

The term 'wellbeing' encompasses our **physical, mental, financial and social health.** When we think about wellbeing in the workplace, we need a balance of these factors to achieve success.

When we asked our ThinkTank participants to define wellbeing in a word or two, three phrases recurred – **'balance', 'health' (mental & physical) and 'contentment'.**

This supports the concept that seeking balance is fundamental to achieving a sense of wellbeing. This is particularly pertinent to hybrid working and the **blurring of boundaries between home and work.**

Wellbeing is a very personal concept. A one-size-fits-all approach won't meet the needs of all employees within an organisation.

Our approach

These principles were devised after considering our collective experiences internally and with clients.

Within each section, we explore what we heard at the online session and how to incorporate these findings into your business.

This report is structured around four key principles

Key principle one

Wellbeing

belongs to all

The context

As our participants would testify, a sea change has taken place. There's been a call across most sectors for wellbeing to be a higher corporate priority. It's become accepted that employees should expect and deserve a greater focus on mental and physical health from their employer.

Less clear, though, is just how wellbeing practices should be implemented, how far-reaching they should be and who bears responsibility for them. A key misconception around wellbeing is that it somehow fits within the remit of a singular function like HR (if at all). According to our participants, the responsibility of wellbeing needs to sit with the institution and not just the individual.

What we heard

There is a need for leadership, line managers and functions like HR to be even more accountable to allow lasting change to occur. It's clear that most businesses have a great deal of work to do when it comes to justifying wellbeing activity within their own organisations.

While leadership was perceived to have the biggest impact in setting the wellbeing agenda (and in particular, HR and Internal Communications), participants suggested that the whole workforce has a role to play.However, the vast majority of our participants agreed that line managers would need to ensure uniformity and consistency of any wellbeing approach. Their involvement and support was perceived as critical. This then needs to be actively endorsed by leadership, so that wellbeing can truly reach the top of the corporate agenda.

WE ASKED

Rate the impact each of these groups could have on promoting wellbeing as a priority within your workplace

Group	Impact
Leadership	
Everyone	
Line Managers	
Champions	

No impact   High impact
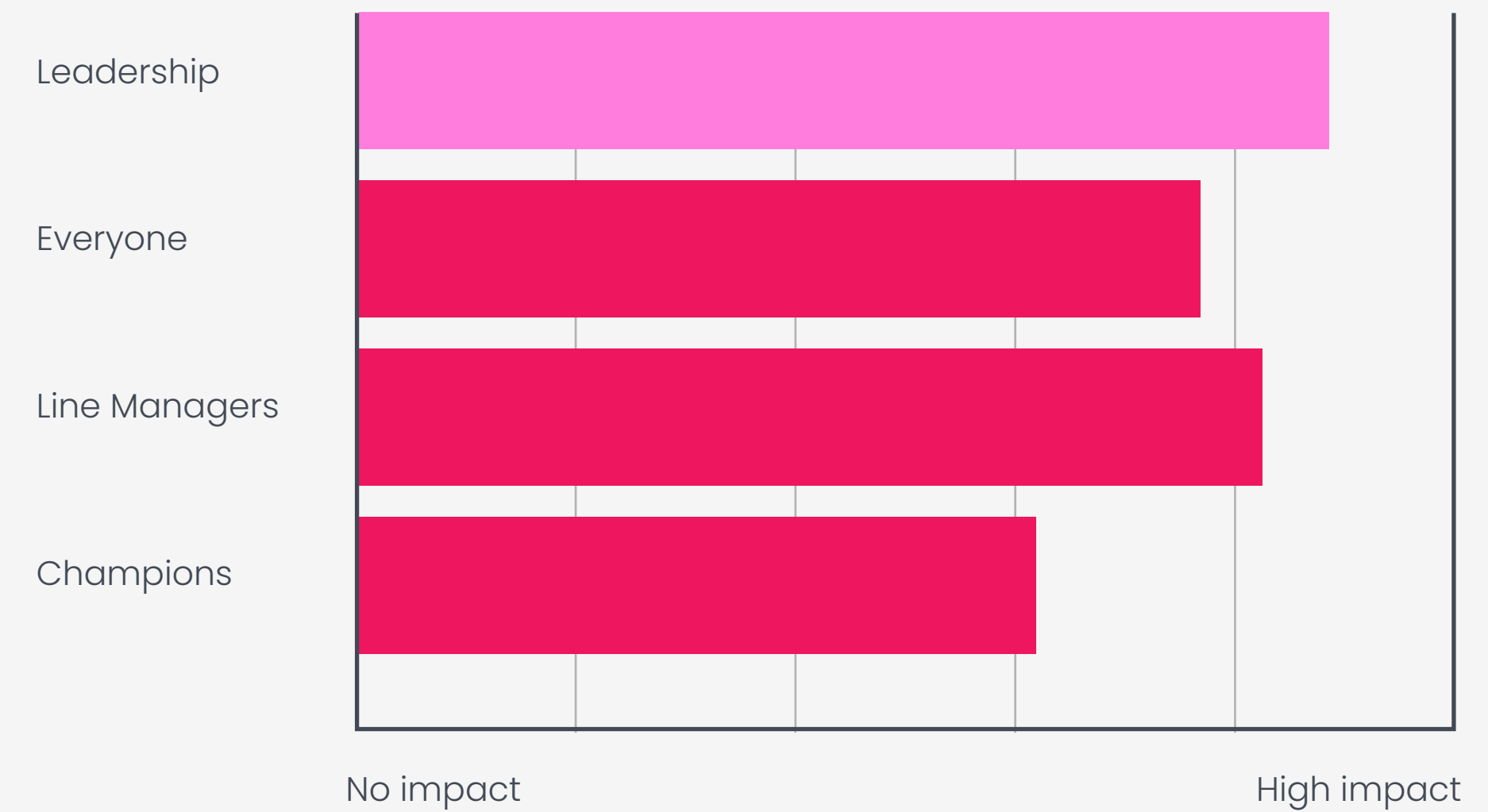
YOU SAID

"Leadership should set the agenda and HR and Comms can bring it to life"

An issue expressed by a number of participants, which could hamper this, was the perception of a clash between HR and leadership. If there are disagreements at the top on the wellbeing agenda and its implementation, employees will not feel that they have the backing of leadership to pursue it. When asked if employees in their organisations felt that their leaders and line managers were well equipped to deal with wellbeing, the response was lukewarm or heavily qualified.

Our participants want their leaders to display humanity, vulnerability and to share their own stories about wellbeing and personal growth. To become role models for wellbeing, leaders need to practise what they preach and encourage open dialogue across their organisation. Our participants want to see wellbeing lived and experienced, not given as a directive. It should be made clear that time to focus on wellbeing events or workshops can be scheduled in the diary. More specifically, it was felt that the wellbeing agenda shouldn't be a series of disconnected initiatives, but rather a more evolved way of working.

WE ASKED

How well-equipped are leaders and line managers to support their team?

Not at all

Very
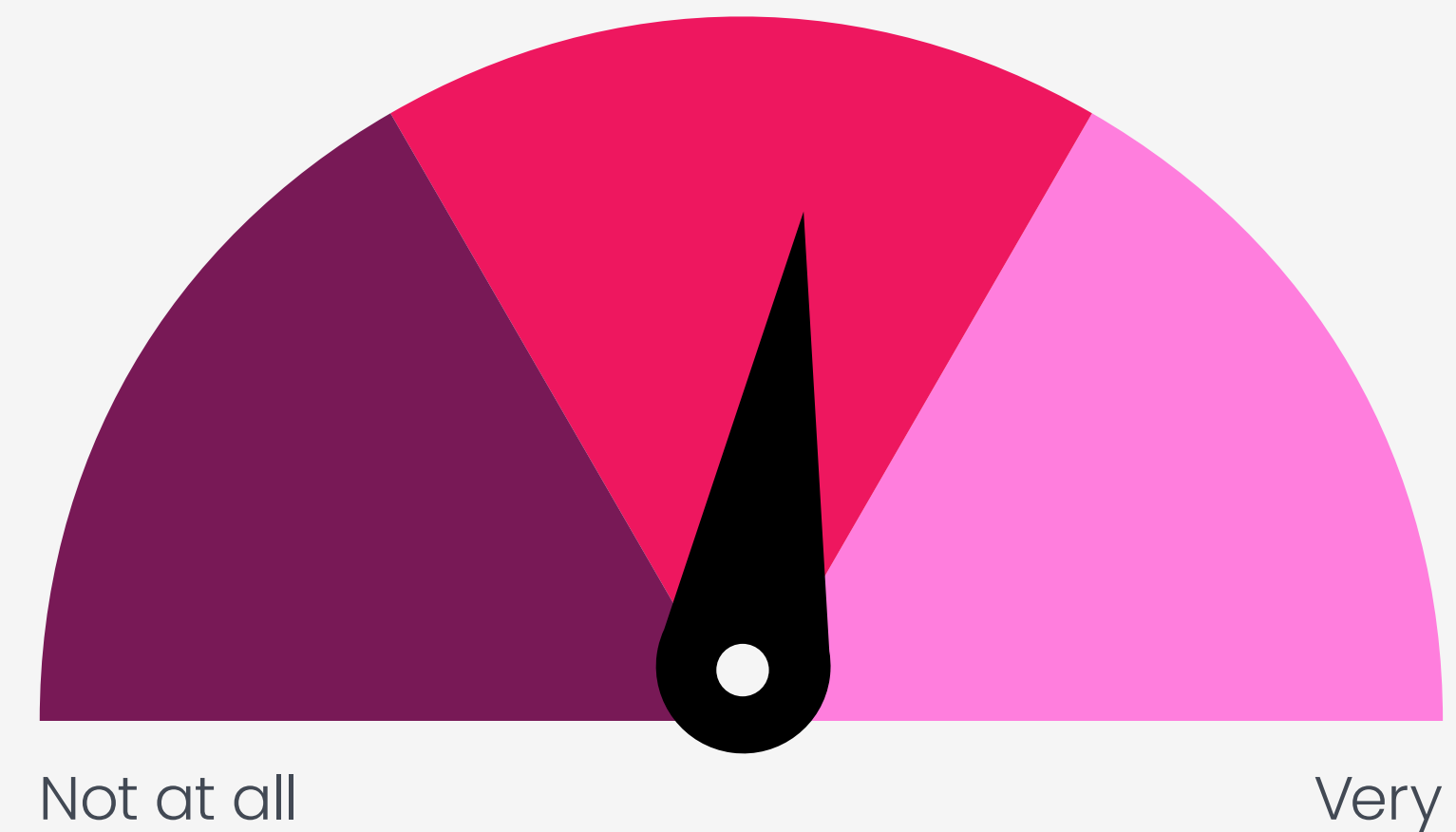
Key principle two

The health of your business depends upon the health of your people

The context

Another startling misconception to date has been the perception of wellbeing as optional – not critical – to business activity. That it's disconnected from core business activity. That it has no impact on the bottom line. It's a nice-to-have. Historically, it's also been difficult to quantify the impact of wellbeing activity, which may have helped ambivalent attitudes to persist.

But consider the following...boosted productivity. Higher retention rates. Increased external reputation. Recruitment of better talent. When a business culture resets the norms around transparency and openness, incredible things start to happen. Employees feel more at home than ever before. Free to truly be themselves at work, employees will feel more comfortable and more confident in what they do. It's perhaps better – as our participants did – to also ask: what could an organisation lose from failing to implement wellbeing effectively?

But wellbeing doesn't have a real impact on the business, does it?

What we heard

Our participants pointed to the need to identify and better communicate the far-reaching benefits of a properly integrated approach to wellbeing.

Some of those benefits were more obvious, such as 'happier employees' and 'productivity' of individuals. Others suggested that overall employee engagement would increase, as would the likelihood of personal growth.

Beyond these, it was felt that a pro-active approach to wellbeing would improve employee retention and recruitment, as well as enhancing the company reputation internally and externally. In other words, prioritising wellbeing means happier, more rounded employees who actively contribute to the overall growth of the business.

WE ASKED

In your organisation, how important is wellbeing to leadership, managers and employees?

Leadership

Managers

Employees

Not at all   Very important
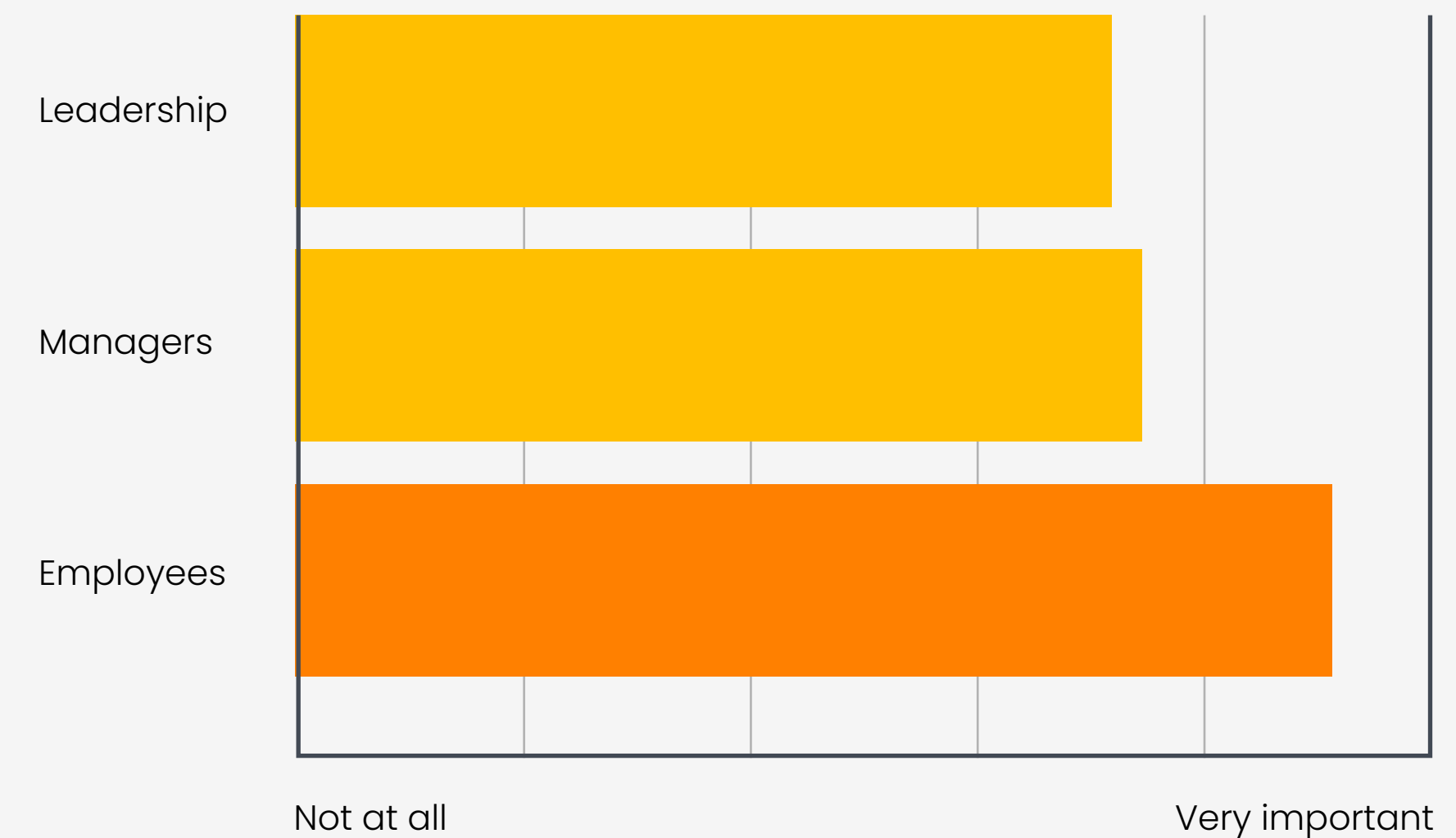
YOU SAID

"Make wellbeing part of
a company scorecard or KPI.
That which gets measured,
gets attention"

Despite the vast majority of our participants (90%) citing wellbeing as important to the employees of their organisation, it was felt that it was a higher priority for employees than for line managers and leaders. Are leaders and managers less likely to think wellbeing is important? If so, why? And, if this is just a perception, what should managers and leaders be doing to address it?

Many spoke of the importance of giving line managers wellbeing-related key performace indicators (KPIs). It was felt that this was one way of giving wellbeing parity with other traditional workplace measures like performance. As an expression of a business that takes wellbeing seriously and believes in its benefits and positive impact, universal performance indicators at a managerial level carried great weight amongst our participants.

"Line managers
need to play a critical role"

Key principle three

Wellbeing is integral to the employee experience

The context

Although there has been a wider shift in attitudes, there are individuals or areas within organisations who see wellbeing as an optional extra, or are unable to implement activities more strategically.

Culture plays a large role in wellbeing. It helps create an environment where employees feel able to talk openly about their mental health and how it might be affecting them, both at work and at home. It provides a supportive environment where colleagues, managers and leaders work together to facilitate these honest conversations, to ensure people don't feel that wellbeing is a taboo subject.

To ensure that any wellbeing agenda truly benefits everyone and to avoid a tokenistic approach, it should be present and visible at every step of the employee journey. Yoga at lunchtimes and access to mindfulness apps are useful, but in isolation they don't go far enough to cover the range of employee wellbeing needs and cover the spectrum of mental, physical and financial wellbeing.

What we heard

Nearly 80% of participants agreed that more needed to be done to bring wellbeing to the top of the corporate agenda and, that currently, it isn't as integrated into the culture of organisations as it needs to be.

When asked explicitly about the gaps relating to wellbeing in their organisation, our participants were frank, open and consistent in their responses. Education, training and coaching – at all levels – was seen as a key missing piece, particularly around communicating effectively and having difficult conversations.

Our participants were unequivocal in the need for wellbeing to be seen as a business need-to-have, with investment to match. Despite this, a lack of financial investment was cited as a strong challenge.

Wellbeing needs to be a part of recruitment, onboarding, communications and training. In other words, it needs to be part of every aspect of the employee experience and not just covered by the occasional workshop or one-off initiative.

YOU RATED THIS STATEMENT

More needs to be done
to bring wellbeing to the top of the corporate agenda

Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

WE ASKED

How integrated is wellbeing
into the culture of your organisation?

Not at all   Completely

All of this has to be backed wholeheartedly and visibly by leadership and, in turn, by well-supported line managers. Only then can line managers have the right conversations with their teams and conduct the most fruitful one-to-one check-ins. In short, the whole culture has to reflect and be reshaped by a more positive, all-business attitude to wellbeing.

Internal communications were described as a much-needed expression and driver of a more impactful approach to wellbeing. Accepting differences and a more tailored approach to wellbeing was also felt to be important.

The needs of every individual should be considered, whether that be their work role, overall health, or domestic or cultural context. For example, participants argued that some employees may need to take more time away from work than others, and shouldn't be penalised because of it. Again, this reinforces the idea that not every employee experience is the same.

YOU SAID

"Some people need more downtime than others and **no one should feel bad about that**"

Principle four

Wellbeing
is more than words

The context

Wellbeing hasn't necessarily been the easiest element to action in the corporate world. Part of the problem has been its perceived intangibility – something easier to talk about or 'feel,' integrate in to the daily operation of a business. We know the worth of open conversations, but also know that there's still more to do to make employees comfortable talking about their own mental health. A strategic plan, strong internal communications and company-wide action is what will make wellbeing work.

Identifying the challenges faced and creating clear, defined focus areas backed by multiple initiatives, can help to overcome barriers to wellbeing. But, as our participants have identified, the art of doing wellbeing well– and turning talk into action – remains a huge challenge in many organisations.

What we heard

With some degree of comfort, our participants said that wellbeing has been integrated into their respective organisations. Most spoke of a spread of listening activities taking place – surveys, focus groups, one-to-ones with managers and employee working groups.

Mental and physical health came up frequently as important focus areas, along with nutrition. Many covered flexible working as part of their wellbeing approach and the need to give employees greater freedom over how they work.

Participants identified various barriers to making the wellbeing agenda a priority. Challenges ranged from the personal to the cultural, the individual to the institutional, but unsurprisingly, 'time' was the resource (most felt) they needed to enhance wellbeing measures. Many actually found the act of trying to allocate time to promote wellbeing stressful in itself.

WE ASKED

How important are these challenges to tackle?

Lack of time

Lack of finance

Attached stigma

HR/Leaderhip Clashes

Not at all   Very
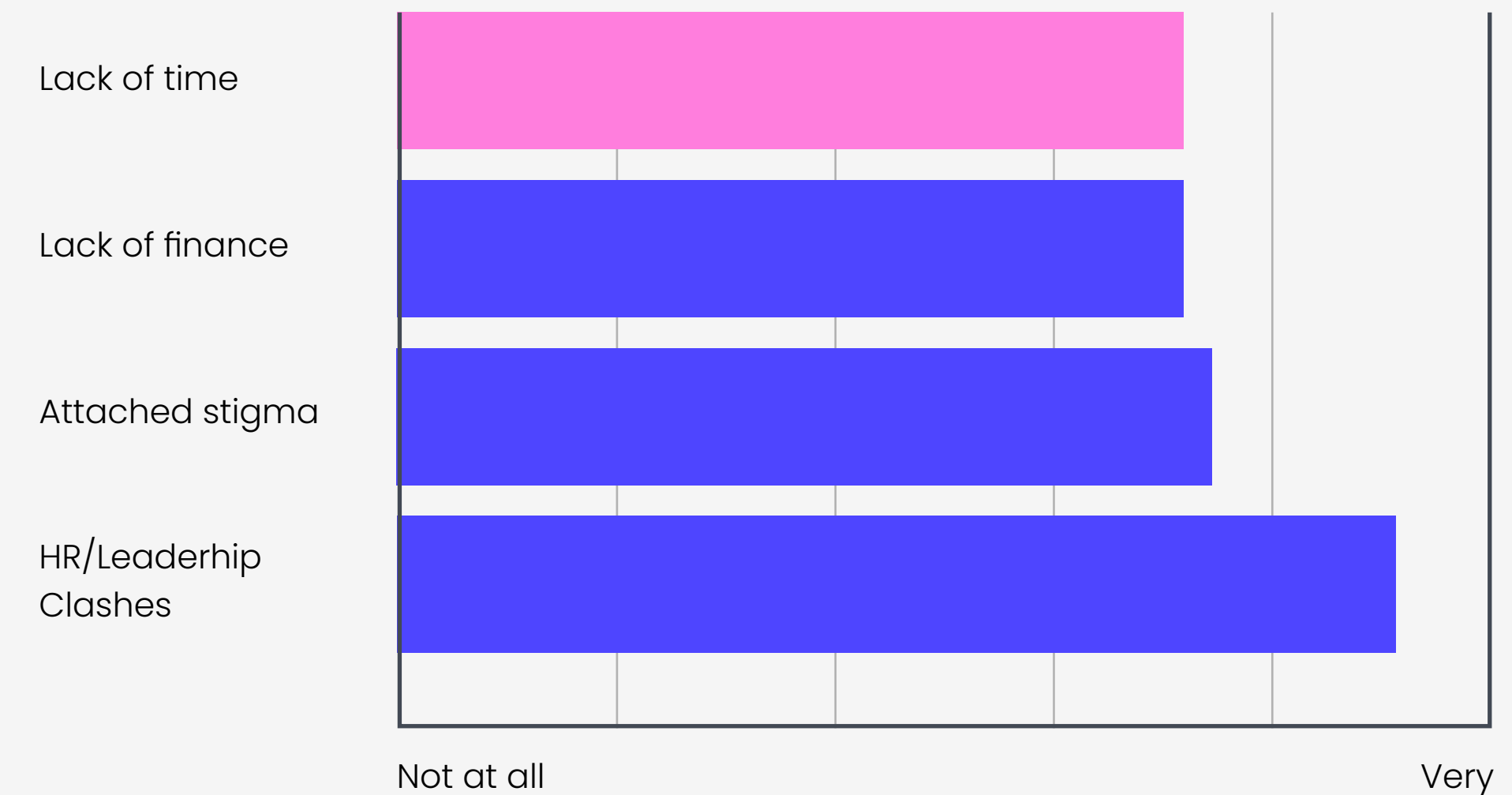
YOU SAID

"So much of wellbeing depends on people's perception of their business. Can we offer people training on prioritisation?"

Collectively, we identified that ensuring individuals feel empowered and have a sense of responsibility for their own wellbeing is imperative. Employees need to have the power to support their own wellbeing (whatever that means to them) and the power to support their colleagues and teams by checking in regularly.

When asked for their thoughts around the big changes that needed to occur to build wellbeing into everyday action, our participants firstly cited the need for ongoing listening and conversation. Secondly, they affirmed that measurement was also key – for wellbeing to be valued, it needed to be treated on a par with other performance indicators. Thirdly, wellbeing had to be put into action. It was clearly felt that, despite good intentions and a great deal of talk around wellbeing, many organisations weren't taking enough of a pragmatic, practical approach to implementation.

YOU SAID

"Move wellbeing from an initiative **to a way of working"**

"Get the penny to drop across the whole organisation that this topic is now an intrinsic part of a company's Employee Value Proposition (EVP)"

Wellbeing

in practice

Wherever you are on your wellbeing journey,
we believe there are several

key actions

your business can take to support a
thought-through, impactful wellbeing approach.

1 Audit

A useful first step in improving the experience is to audit the wellbeing activities and communications currently in place. Once you have feedback from employees, you can effectively identify any gaps.

Often, an impartial look at the current landscape can be helpful in driving recommendations and implementing change.

2 Listen

There's a definite need in organisations for more (or should we say 'the right type of') listening activities. In an Aon study conducted this year, nearly a third of employers surveyed didn't carry out any research or listening activities to understand employees' needs.

We know that regular, active listening goes a long way in making employees feel heard. If people feel that they are being listened to and their opinions matter, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging.

There are a number of ways you can do this, and it's about finding the mix of listening activities that are right for your organisation and your people. To supplement existing surveys and ensure you get a deeper understanding of complex topics, regular anonymous online focus groups can be a great tool to gain insights and involve employees in co-creating solutions. In addition, line managers can carry out in depth interviews one to one to gauge how employees are feeling.

3 Plan

The wellbeing agenda should not be something that happens annually, but in an ongoing and systematic company-wide conversation. Taking the time to develop a clear wellbeing in the workplace strategy (with relevant key pillars/priorities) is crucial. If agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders, it will help to drive the initiatives developed, the communications around wellbeing and the types of conversations that leaders and managers have with their teams.

Any plan should cover:

- **Talent attraction and recruitment** – how companies communicate what they believe in and key initiatives that differentiate them from the competition to prospective talent

- **Onboarding** – the way that the wellbeing offer is shared with new starters

- **Engagemen**t – how companies continually encourage employees to prioritise wellbeing and access the tools and resources they need

4 Align

There needs to be real clarity on who is responsible for wellbeing within an organisation in order to develop and deliver on the strategy. This will be different depending on the type of company you're in. In some organisations, there is a wellbeing officer and specific roles within HR and communications, as well as a working group who have this within their remit. For others, there might be no natural home, so it sits with someone in HR. From the outset, there needs to be an agreement on how each function (i.e. HR, Internal Communications, Marketing) will work together and what each of them will do. Carving out key roles and responsibilities – as you would with any project – will support success and actionability.

Connecting wellbeing to line manager and leader KPIs can also support focus on this in the workplace, and can be supported by the relevant coaching.

5 Create

Ensuring you have the right creative approach, ideas and assets to be able to communicate the wellbeing opportunities to employees is just as important as the sentiment. It will ensure your key messages stand out and are noticed by employees. It can be useful to create a visual identity for wellbeing communications that can be easily recognised. This can also help to differentiate from regular HR-focused drumbeat communications.

6 Communicate

Developing a clear communication strategy, plan and relevant content is crucial in ensuring the right messages reach the right people at the right time. This can include tapping in to relevant internal channels (intranet, social platform such as Yammer, email, Teams, screens within offices/ plants etc). This helps turn a plan in to action and ensures that wellbeing is communicated regularly and that employees have an opportunity to give feedback.

Signposting resources, help and support is also important. There's no point having great resources, if nobody knows where to find them. Having one place that your people can find this info is helpful (i.e., Yammer, Workplace or the intranet). Keep in mind that your employees will have different preferences in the way they consume information. Make sure you include links to a variety of resources, such as mindfulness podcasts, articles, short videos, a series of animations, or hints & tips for physical and mental wellbeing. You can also include any partnerships you have with health & wellbeing brands. Perhaps you can provide free online workouts and meditation apps, or discounts for gym memberships and health foods.

7 Educate

Line managers may have the skills and capabilities they need to progress in their career, but it doesn't necessarily mean they are immediately equipped to support their teams with their wellbeing. However, they play an integral role because they are both very visible to employees and can influence senior leaders.

Support, training, engagement programmes and ongoing, open dialogue can help them to better demonstrate empathy, understanding and emotional intelligence. Really listening to the source of the problem someone may be experiencing is vital. Demonstrating vulnerability is also key to making employees feel they are not alone in their struggles and that their managers are real people too.

There are simple things managers can implement that create the space and time for employees to talk and encourage positive behaviours:

• Scheduling weekly 20-minute check-ins
• Honouring lunch breaks
• Only emailing/messaging team members within work hours
• Creating forums to encourage the sharing of best practices and advice

8 Measure

Measurement of the mental health of an organisation is just as crucial as its financial health. It can have an impact on employee attraction, productivity, retention and engagement. But it's important to recognise that traditional measures are not enough.

Regular gathering of input through a combination of listening activities is essential. This could be through pulse surveys, feedback from line managers on the wellbeing of their teams and anonymous 'have your say' exercises. Both deep and scattered learning techniques will be required to give regular, accurate snapshots.

Companies should be transparent internally and externally about improvements made and how practices evolve year on year to address the needs of their employees. This will help build trust that they are taking on board the needs of employees and the changing working landscape (e.g. hybrid working) to help drive positive change.

Where next?

Wherever you are on your Wellbeing Journey, we want you to progress. In reading this report, you'll have been able to identify echoes of your own organisation's Wellbeing journey. We'll hopefully have given you insights and ideas on how to continue onwards. You may also be realising that you need help or advice listening to your own people, educating leaders, or evaluating the employee experience as a whole.

We know it's one thing to understand and be motivated to change – but another to make it happen. We offer a variety of services to help you create bespoke plans that acknowledge the specific needs of your business. This could be a diagnostic session that assesses Wellbeing within your organisation, or support with bringing existing strategies to life in an authentic way that connects to your business, employees and society. Get in touch with Laura or Richelle to find out more.

Laura Hunt,
Engagement Consultant

Laura has worked in engagement and communications for over 15 years. With experience of working with a diverse range of brands and sectors, from Healthcare to automotive to Professional Services.

Previously working at McCann Manchester, she has extensive experience in developing communication strategy, plans and working closely with creative teams to deliver multi-channel campaigns and initiatives. Since joining the Creative Engagement Group, she has worked on a range of employee engagement challenges – finding a creative solution to increase engagement and ensuring that listening forms a key part of the process. She enjoys collaborating with the virtual and hybrid events team, as well as our digital and film teams to create experiences and moments that create lasting change. Laura is passionate about wellbeing and finding solutions to help organisations integrate this into their employee experience, across a range of touchpoints.

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Richelle Feigin,
Senior Communications and Engagement Consultant

Richelle has more than 25 years' experience as a creative, results-oriented communications professional. She is a strategic thinker who knows how to engage, motivate and sustain the interest of employees in corporate initiatives. Richelle has provided strategic communications support in the pharmaceutical, technological, chemical and medical device industries.

As part of her role at Forty1, she leads wellbeing communications for one of our largest pharmaceutical clients. The work this team does helps to build programme offerings with targeted campaigns and amplified messaging, demonstrating the priority this client puts on employee wellbeing. They also measure progress, celebrate successes and share best practices among employees, their families and stakeholders around the world. Before joining Forty1, Richelle led employee communications for BASF's North American operations and Prudential's technology infrastructure group.

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The full data

When thinking about wellbeing
in the workplace, what does
success look like?

· Open communication
· Actions rather than just words
· Engaged employees
· Authenticity/transparency
· Reduced turnover due
to burn-out

**"Employees are able to speak
to their supervisors candidly."**

"Better communication"

"Leaders practising what they preach"

What three words come to mind
when you think about wellbeing?

· Health
· Balance
· Contentment

What do you see as the benefits
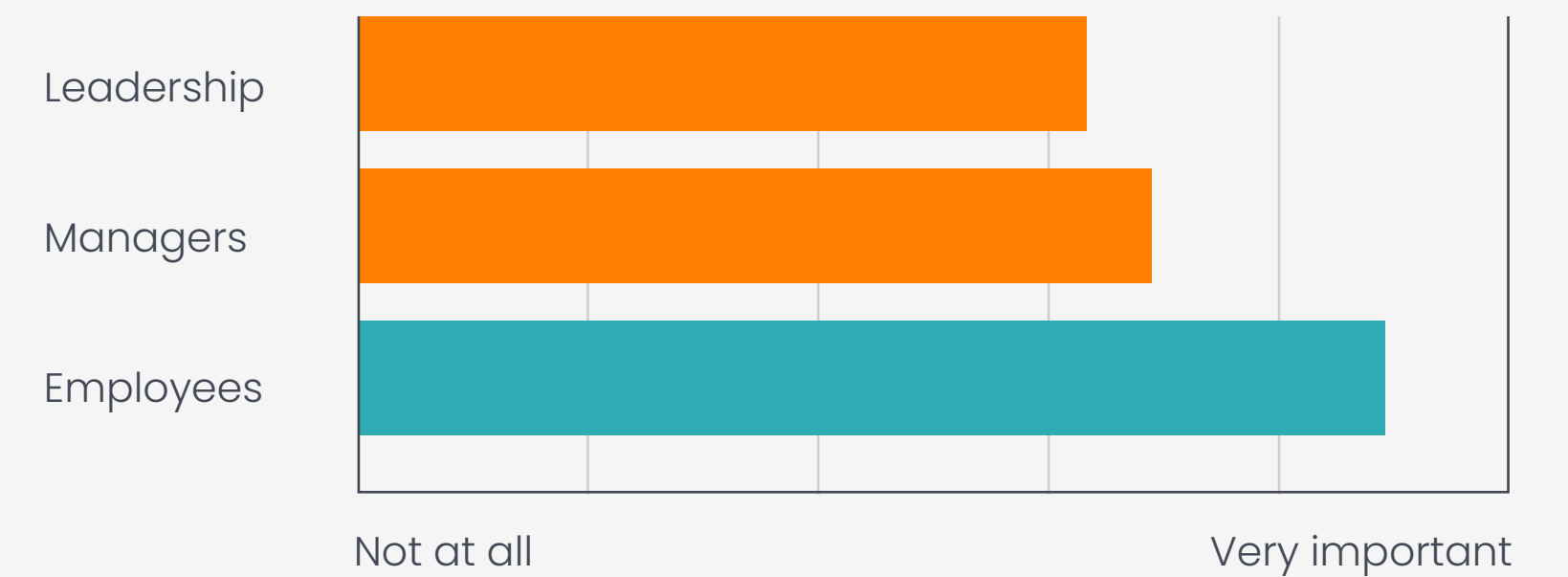for an organisation that
prioritises wellbeing?

· Productivity
· Retention
· Engagement
· Growth
· Great reputation

**"If done effectively, drives
engagement and productivity."**

Rate your agreement with this statement:
More needs to be done when it comes to bringing
wellbeing to the top of the corporate agenda.

Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

In your organisation, how important is wellbeing to:

Leadership

Managers

Employees

Not at all   Very important

Who is responsible for wellbeing
in your organisation?

- HR/People team
- Everyone
- It's not always clear
- Leadership
- The individual

"Should be teams, but often
expectations is HR."

What are the focus areas for your
wellbeing approach?

- Mental health
- Nutrition
- Awareness comms
- Training & Education
- Sleep

"Exercise, Preventive Health,
Financial Health, Mental Health,
Healthy Habits, Nutrition, Challenges"

Who else should be involved
to ensure wellbeing sits at
the heart of your culture?

- Leadership/Senior executive
- Everyone
- Line managers
- Enabling functions
- Health & Safety teams
- L&D to develop training
for managers

"Leadership should set the agenda and
HR and Comms can bring it to life."

How comfortable are people talking about mental health?

Not comfortable   Very comfortable

How integrated is wellbeing into the culture of your organisation?

Not integrated   Very integrated

Rate the impact each of these would have on increasing
the importance of wellbeing in your organisation.

Leadership

Everyone

Managers

Employees

Not impactful   Very impactful
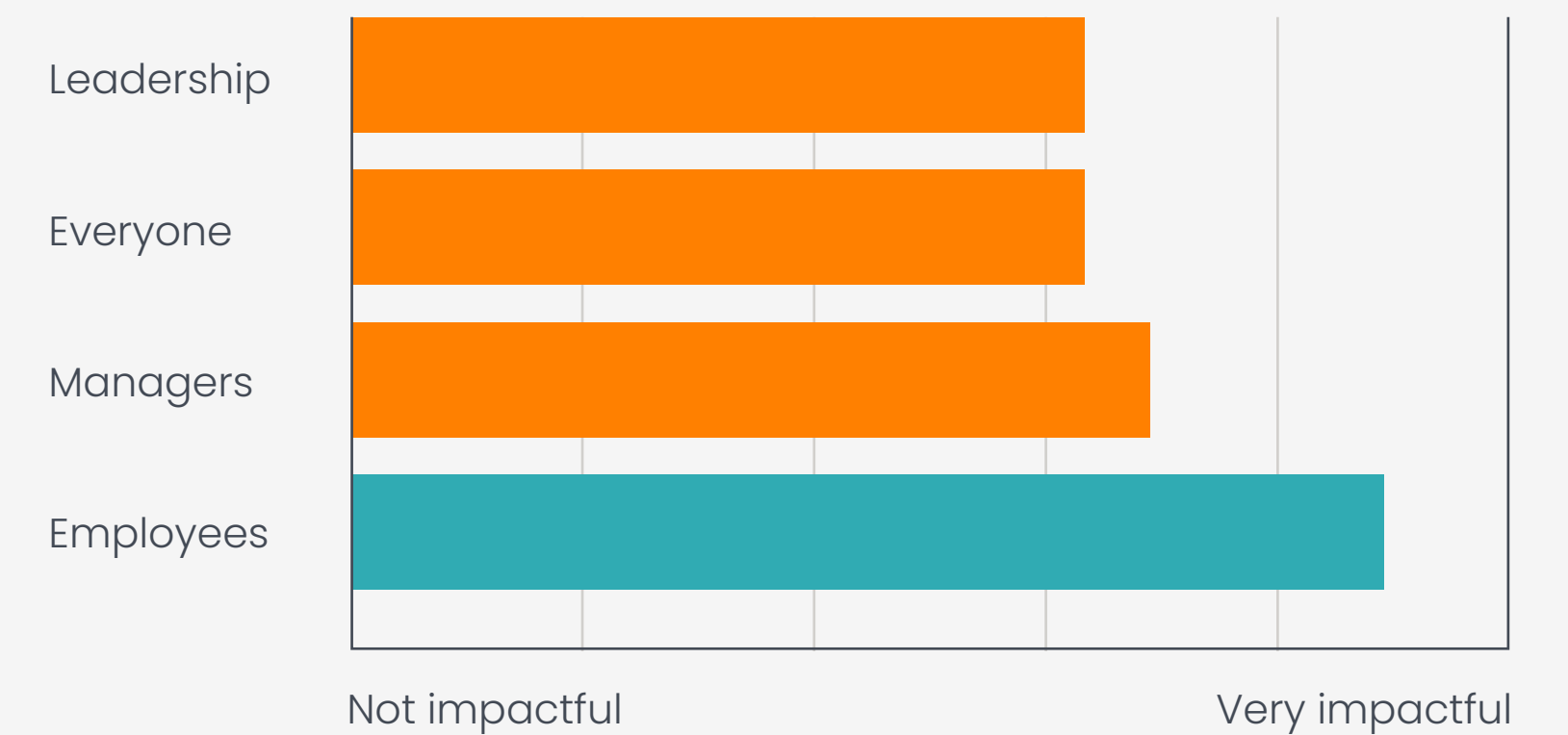
We voted leadership as most impactful
in increasing the importance of wellbeing.
How do you think they could be encouraged
to take further action?

- Sharing their own experiences
- Thought leadership on key topics
- Have accountability to the board
- Talk to employees – ask them questions and act on what you learn

"Talking about their own struggles
to encourage others."

"Model behaviour that allows others to do the same."

"Communicate data points about how focusing
on wellness has a benefit and doesn't detract
from business success."

How do you find out what really matters to your people, what listening activities are in place?

- Surveys
- 1:1s with line managers
- Intentional conversations
- Manager Q&As that cascade up the feedback
- Focus groups
- Working groups burn-out

"Surveys are so one dimension though, should be more of an open-door policy."

"Regular check-ins that ladder up to management and leadership meetings."

"Social events - people are honest there too (!)."

What wellbeing initiatives are in place?

- Employee assistance programs
- Mental health first aiders/ Champions network
- Flexible/Hybrid working
- Links to resources
- Working groups

"Line Manager's Mental Health Training."

How do colleagues find resources/ how are they signposted?

- Intranet
- Company comms/updates
- Line managers
- Yammer
- Mental health first aiders/champions
- Word of mouth

"Shared at new hire orientation."

What is the biggest challenge when it comes to implementing wellbeing in your organisation?

- Lack of time
- High workload
- Cost/lack of financial investment in it
- Fear of sharing openly
- What line managers are measured on

"Conflict of making time for yourself vs the stress that taking time out from work can cause."

"Ridiculous workload - contributes to mental health challenges and there's no time to exercise or eat right."

"Cost savings clashing with wellbeing."

We voted 'lack of time' as the top-priority challenge when it comes to implementing wellbeing. How can we tackle this challenge?

- Easier processes
- Improve time management skills
- Prioritisation – understand important vs urgent tasks
- Interventions to encourage people to take breaks
- Measure wellbeing

"HR tell people to take breaks but leaders want more money & time spent with clients."

"Can we have screen savers that 'force people' to take breaks?"

"Time is made for what matters and what matters are measured; therefore, wellbeing should be measured."

What are the gaps?
- They need coaching/training
- Too many potential focus areas
- Leadership need to set expectations
- Protected time for wellbeing
- Perceived permission to focus on wellbeing
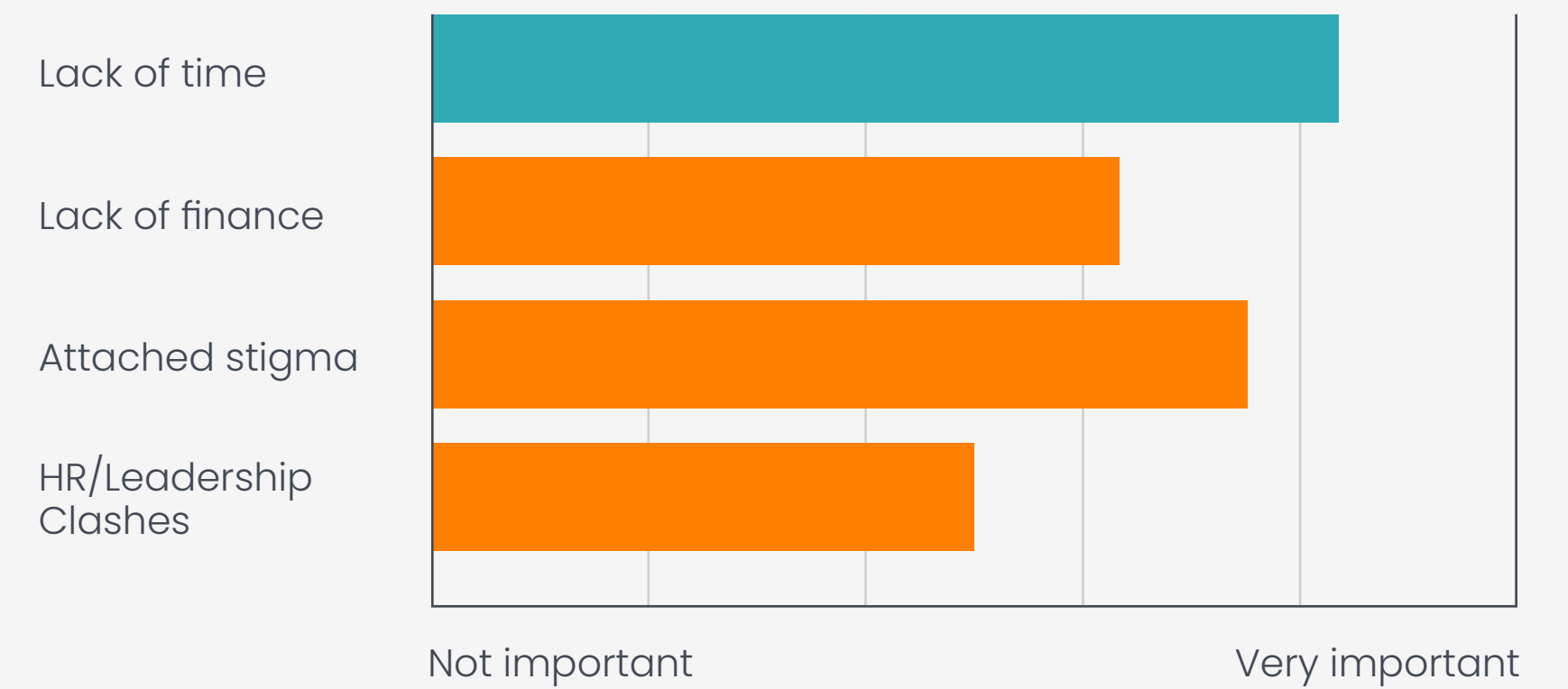- Seen as part of their role (e.g. KPIs)

"Give them the tools to ask the right questions."

"Coaching and training designed to help them participate in difficult conversations."

How well-equipped are leaders and line managers to support their teams?

Not well-equipped   Very well-equipped

Please rate each of these challenges in terms of how important they are to tackle.

Lack of time

Lack of finance

Attached stigma

HR/Leadership Clashes

Not important   Very important

How do we measure wellbeing
on an ongoing basis?

- Turnover rates
- Anonymous surveys
- Regular check-ins
- Long term sick rates
- Mind Wellbeing Index

**"Supervisor led conversations focused
on just checking in with team members."**

What's the one major change that
organisations need to make to
build wellbeing into everyday action?

- Talk about it
- Measure wellbeing/make it a KPI
- Don't just talk about it – take action
- Acknowledge the impact of COVID-19
- Support wellbeing plans

**"Make wellbeing part of a company
scorecard measure or KPI. What gets
measured gets attention."**

**"Have honest dialogue about health
amid and after COVID-19."**

**"Get regular feedback from people
and ensure they're being heard by
actioning their feedback."**

How do colleagues find resources/
how are they signposted?

- Intranet
- Company comms/updates
- Line managers
- Yammer
- Mental health first aiders/champions
- Word of mouth

"It has to come from the top!"

How can leaders signal positive behaviours
and be role models for wellbeing?

- Share their own stories
- Embed wellbeing as a way of working
- Encourage dialogue
- Walk the talk/practice
  what they preach
- Be open and vulnerable
  about their own wellbeing

**"Put it on the official agenda –
metrics, funding, resources etc."**

Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

"Cultural differences should be considered."

"Accepting differences – some people need more downtime than others and no one should feel bad about that."

"Wellbeing initiatives are not plasters for poor culture or practices."

"How are companies reporting employee wellbeing in ESG/CR reports? How are external shareholders viewing wellbeing?"

"Would love to see some benchmarking across industries about the impact of wellbeing."

"I think internal comms and wellbeing are intrinsically linked – when teams and individuals feel well informed, the culture automatically improves."

"Training for managers on navigating mental health conversations. It can't all be left at MHFAs door."

"Improve internal processes/ infrastructure/IT so it's easier to do your job. This was amplified during pandemic."